'At my banquet', he says, 'there is merry talk, without bitterness, with liberty to speak as if fasting, and no words that you would wish not to be said. In short, let my table companions speak of this thing and that, in such wise that my wine does not confuse their words.'

Sigma then was a symbol for the place where man feasted decently, without a great effusion of words; and this place would hold no more than seven persons, which is a number composed of odd and even; and in reference to this odd number, Virgil said, in the first book of his *Æneid,*—

O terque quaterque beati,—*

* I, 94.

to show that that number of seven persons could converse without confusion. And Martial says,

Septem Sigma capit, sex sumus adde Lupum.†

† X, XLVIII, 6.

He says in another passage, that this place aforementioned might be large enough for eight persons; this, too, is less than the number of the nine Muses, which number Aulus Gellius, in the eleventh chapter of book XIII of his *Noctes Atticæ,* declares to be the greatest number of persons proper for a banquet, when he remarks that every well-ordered feast, in respect to the number of guests, should begin with the three Graces and end with the nine Muses.‡ Martial says furthermore of this same Sigma,—

‡ *Gellius says that three is the minimum number for a feast, and nine the maximum.*

Accipe lunata scriptum testudine Sigma,
Octo capit, veniat quisquis amicus erit.56

'Take,' he says, 'the Sigma written in the curved arch; there may be therein eight persons, and therefore let any good friend of mine come thither.'

Whoso should wish to read his fill on this matter, let him seek in the XVIII chapter of the seventh book of the Ancient Lessons of Celius,§ wherein he treats of the said Sigma and of other notable matters.

§ *Heretofore referred to as Celius Rhodiginus, or Rhodiginus alone.*

THE letter S, then, was, in former times, so symbolic of silence, that the comic poets made use of it as an improper syllable, that is to say, a syllable without a vowel, by adding to it a T only, to impose silence upon someone who was speaking, and wrote it thus: ST. Plautus, in his comedy called *Truculentus,* in the act beginning, *Rus mane me hinc*

ire jussit Pater, introduces a character named Strabax, who says to himself: *Hodie efferam ad hanc argentum quam mage amo quam Matrem meam. St ecquis? Nulla est, ecquis aperit hoc ostium?** In like manner, Terence used it in his comedy called *Phormio,* where we find, *Non is obsecro es, quem te semper dicunt, St. quid has metuis fores?*†

* *Truculentus*, III, I, 17.

† *Phormio*, V, I, 16. *The 'St' is an interjection of Chremes between two speeches of Sophrona.*

We, too, use this improper syllable ST, when we would make some one hold his peace and impose silence on him; but some write it *Chut,* which is a complete syllable, that is, a syllable containing a vowel. We might use the ST, as if we should say:

Escoutez, St, escoutez, voyez ou vous vous boutes,
Des lieux en ce monde, ou souvant mal on se fonde.

I have said hereinbefore, when I discoursed upon the letter G, and the rebuses which some jesters make from letters, that he who conceived the rebus of the broad [large] S, which is called *lettre de forme,* & used it as his device, to signify covertly *largesse,* displayed a pleasant wit in the invention of that rebus; but if he had signified thereby *Silence,* as the ancient Fathers did, he would have done even better. Silence and Largesse are two excellent qualities; but Silence is the more efficacious, as you can see in Chapter XV of the first Book of the *Noctes Atticæ* of Aulus Gellius, where we find in a passage from the poet Hesiod,—

Optimus est homini linguæ thesaurus et ingens
Gratia, quæ parcis mensurat singula verbis.

That is to say, the tongue that restrains itself, and measures its words, is a very great treasure and sovereign charm.

HEreon, I would that the great lords who take pleasure in building palaces and mansions, and who love paintings & emblems, would cause an S or ST to be written, painted, engraved, or carved over the doors of their halls & kitchens, in order covertly yet plainly to impose silence on a parcel of roisterers who make more uproar after drinking than a hundred starlings in harvest-time. That would be an admonition, to small and great alike, to be restrained in speech, and to refrain from saying aught that is not pleasant and decent and necessary.

I return to the discussion of our S, and observe that the Toulousans and Gascons commit an error in pronouncing it; for they place an E before it, in such wise that, if they wished to say, *Schola* or *Scribere,* or any like word beginning with S, they would say, *Eschola* and *Escribere,*

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